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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the motivations for doing photography and examines the therapeutic use of photography with various populations. The paper provides an account of how one person was trained as a teacher in the early 1970s but could not find work. He moved into and then out of social work with the elderly in Chicago. Having learned photography skills for administrative purposes, he later returned to photograph his former elderly clients and was struck by the way that the process of taking a picture deepened the interpersonal relationship and commitment between photographer and subject. A literature search on the therapeutic side of photography yielded scant results. The materials found involved using photography in family therapy and covered the following: (1) benefits of photography for disabled children, including opportunities to explore the sensory world and make sense of one's own body and environment; (2) improvement in self-concept and psychological patterns of incarcerated juvenile delinquents after a 5-week photography experience; (3) use of photography to overcome social breakdown syndrome and promote self-esteem and self-reliance in the elderly; (4) use of photography to promote social skills development in children with emotional and behavior disorders; and (5) use of photographs and "photo sculpting" in family therapy. But these did not cover how to create photographs that "reverberate" long after they are viewed. Suggestions for the best way to proceed are requested. An annotated bibliography contains 21 references. (SV)

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A Second Look - Photography As An Experiential and Therapeutic Tool.

David L. Fisk, M.A., M.F.A.

This workshop will examine photographic ability to function beyond craft. By photography's very nature it is experientially based, but that can be its downfall. If used appropriately it can function as a therapeutic tool for personal growth, improve self-esteem, and interventions for individuals, family or groups. Its the processing that counts.

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Photography—A Therapeutic Tool

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When from a long distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the small and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.

—From Marcel Proust's "Petite Madeleine."

Photography with its salient distillations and frozen slices of time speaks to me of reminiscences much as does this passage from Proust. Their ability to extract and hold those impalpable essences is what drew me to photography and two graduate degrees in the process. It's also what draws me to want photography to play a major role in my master's thesis. For me photography speaks with more eloquence and with deeper resonance than do words. Plus, Lewis Hine once said, "If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn't need to lug a camera."

I also believe for all its power in metaphor and discerning meaning that photography is infinitely more concise than is prose. Despite this fact I will not submit 10 photographs in lieu of a paper. It is an option I did consider, however. I will instead write of my own motivations for doing photography and to provide a brief survey of how I've found photography is being used both with E/BD kids or with other groups where parallels can be drawn.

This paper began with the simple notion that I liked doing photography. I felt it was a positive experience both for me and the person photographed almost every time I entered into the process. I did photography through my entire career in social work. I was originally trained in teaching during the late 60's and early 70's. I, like many, saw the ads about the teacher shortage and the rewards of a teaching career. I changed my focus from pre-law and business to teaching and communication Arts & Sciences. It's a change I've never regretted but there simply were no jobs when I finished by BA in '73. Too many people had apparently seen those ads. The last wave of the baby boom crashed on the beach and that was that. There were now more teachers than kids. This would actually be a great ratio, especially with E/BD kids but local governments and taxpayers weren't about to pick up that kind of tab. After applying for countless jobs with 200+ applications, I gave up and went back to my summer job of driving trucks. Good money but low on feelings of fulfillment. Friends of mine were working with the elderly in Chicago. They worked with a group called Little Brothers of the Poor. I stopped each time I'd travel through and finally made the jump. Within a month of my arrival the person doing their photography left. I borrowed money for my first 35mm camera and so my photographic sojourn began.

I took some pictures for the annual reports, posters, etc. and gradually became unhappy with my lack of technical skills. Richard Stromberg at the Jane Adams Center offered me free classes to learn more. I took

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what they offered but with my taste now wetted I became impatient with so little access to the darkroom. I then approached Columbia College and at first got a "no." I wrote the President, Michael Alexandorf a letter explaining that I just wanted to sit in on a class or two and use the darkrooms. I explained where I worked and why I wanted the classes. I made the "community involvement plea" and said at $100/month I couldn't afford tuition and that blocking me for all scholarships because I already had a BA just didn't seem fair. Mr. Alexandorf agreed. I got a free ride for any classes I cared to take for as long as I wanted to take them. It was wonderful! I took nearly every photo class they offered and even a couple of creative writing classes. Most of my photography for classes was done on formal subject matter independent of the old people I worked with. Photography was a release from the work.

In the seven years I stayed there I worked my way up from an assistant to the V.P. of the Board of Directors. I was head of the recruitment and educational outreach programs too. I did a slide show, annual reports, and pamphlets as needed. I was seeing more paper than people so I quit and went to graduate school on an assistantship at Purdue. I got my M.A. and then with a second assistantship got an M.F.A. at Arizona State University.

Now, being gone from my social work position at the Little Brother's of the Poor, I found my whole focus to be on portraits of the elderly with whom 1 worked. I enjoyed bringing my camera and returning as a friend, not as a social worker. If you will excuse the pun it seemed to give my visits a focus they hadn't had before. Many times they'd ask why I wanted to take their picture. I found I had many reasons. I told them Little Brothers could use the picture to explain the work they do. I told them it would help them get the funds needed for the work they do. I told them I had a class and had to take pictures. I told them I thought their stories, faces, and lives were fascinating and needed to be recorded. I told them they were beautiful. I told them I saw years of experience and grace in the wrinkles they seemed at times ashamed of. And finally, I told them I wanted a photograph to remember them by when we were apart.

The process deepened as I became more aware of what I was doing. The classes I took helped as did the natural self-explorations that were prompted by the interactions with the people. I found my relationships with people deepened even after I put away the camera. They sensed a greater commitment from me because I wanted to take their picture.

For the most part, I feel my best photographs were the ones in which I had made the greatest commitment but I have to admit I took some very good pictures of people I knew very little and talked to even less. Some people just seemed very open to the camera, me, and being photographed.

> If I were just curious, it would be very hard to say to someone, "I want to come to your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life." I mean people are going to say, "You're crazy." Plus they're going to keep mighty guarded. But the camera is a kind of license. A lot of people, they want to be paid that much attention and that' s a reasonable kind *of* attention to be paid.
>
> —Diane Arbus

In the beginning of this research I naively believed that there would be lots of photography being done with special populations, including E~/BD kids. To my surprise, under each and every search I initiated. m each system at Northeastern, Loyola University and Columbia College, the monitor constantly read, "No entries found." Finally. a librarian showed me a trick called "truncation." Using this technique I found my first article or two. They were peripheral at best but it was a start and of course they had bibliographies. So, I was off and running, well walking quickly, at least.

> Severely handicapped children are not easy to work with in art, but the rewards are immense. They do need more help from the adult—not in being told what to do or how to do it—but in being understood, and being helped to articulate their unique creative strivings. It may require more energy to empathize, to understand a child who is so different from oneself....

> Art cannot give a blind child sight, a retarded child clear comprehension or a crippled child free mobility; but it can and does give a child an exciting, stimulating, and pleasurable way enjoy and explore the sensory world....
>
> It gives him a way to control, to order, to "map out" a confusing sense of his body or of his environment, of time or space—to make sense out of things through organizing them, or to organize himself in the productive activity. It gives him a way to discover and define himself through genuine choices and decisions. and creations which are uniquely his....

These quotes, though addressed to the broader grouping of "Exceptional Children," speak eloquently to the benefits E/BD kids could reap from exposure to photography and art, too.

In one study done at Tulane University. 89, 13 to 16 year old incarcerated juvenile delinquents, were given the TSCS (Tennessee Self-Concept Scale) before and after a five week, five assignment, photographic experiment. In the areas of Total Self-Concept. Self-Satisfaction and Psychological Defenses, all participants improved significantly both In comparisons to their previous scores and over the non-participating control group. This is not surprising to me but there's very little hard data out there to reinforce scientifically my suspicions.

This is a call for more research.

Myself, I'd prefer to do more photography.

One peripheral article I read on "Improving Elderly Clients' Attitudes through Photography" mentioned S. B. S.

> "Social breakdown syndrome" (SBS) in which an elderly person, labeled incompetent, is gradually shaped into the behaviors appropriate to the new, dependent, role. Previous skills drop out and soon the person functions and labels him or herself as "sick," "inadequate," "senile." The elderly are seen to be particularly susceptible to the SBS because of the drastic social reorganization they experience.

They go on to illuminate how the client's limitations are often sustained by the very environment that was supposed to help them. They stress active interventions to promote self-reliance, self-control. and to develop an internal locus of control. To this end they used photography as one intervention and achieved very promising results. It could be that the hands-on nature of photography and the feelings of accomplishment that comes with it are what triggers the successes in enlivening the group or individuals. Certainly just the increased interaction that it promotes with the assignments also helps. Either way positive results were achieved and nothing was unique to the situation with the elderly. I believe E/BD kids, especially those in restrictive settings. also experience S.B.S. It is also by contention that they could benefit In the same manner from the increased formal interactions that photographic projects would promote. Latent, dusty. social skills could be utilized. New ones could sprout.

Another of the first articles I found directly applicable to using photography with E/BD kids was by Pat Gallagher of the University of Kansas. The title of the article was "Social Skills and Photography." To my surprise much of the article was spent on developing the need for social skills training. Working with E/BD kids, I just assumed this was a given. The article says that photography was an immediate hit. She attributes this to the "macho image" photography portrays and the instant gratification students get with quick results. Probably the most important aspects though was how quickly the kids took to peer tutoring in photography, or sharing and teaching what they had learned. The other big positive was the students learning to deal with constructive critique. Many of the kids mentioned had little to no positive experiences previous to photography in regards to accepting or giving criticism in a constructive manner. This was again a great area of improvement.

The area which surprised me the most was that of photography's use in therapy. I had no idea that therapists were using photography in such a variety of ways and to such a large extent.

Some therapists had clients do family photo research. They asked them to bring in a number of photographs of their families and then through discussions of these photographs, the people included. The people missing, poses, positions, etc. they try to help the clients unearth things that may contribute positively to how they lead their lives now. Just the photo search in many cases provide rewarding as clients were given a reason to go to relatives with whom their contact may be limited and ask if they had family photographs, and who's in them and is this or that story true, etc. This process facilitated communications and self-exploration both for the clients and their relatives whether or not these relationships were good or bad, close or distant.

In family therapy interpretations and explanations of photographs were also interesting in how they differed from one person in the photograph to another.

Another use of photography in family therapy was to take photographs at the beginning and/or the end of a therapy session. Poses, positions and expressions all became points for interpreting both within an individual session, and also over the process therapy in weeks, months in even years.

One particularly rich vein for photography's use was "photo sculpting." This could be utilized in several ways but the one I found the most rich was where a family member would be asked to compose his family. That is he or she, even if they were very young. would be asked to have their family pose. The child, in this case would tell the dad where to stand and what expression to have and would proceed through the whole family. The individuals were given complete freedom and the outcomes though varied were indeed rich. Another important facet of family sculpting was the use of pictures. relics or articles of clothing to represent missing or deceased family members. A friend of mine who does family counseling told of an instance where a young child asked his mom to hold a picture of his deceased father and told his step-father to turn his back to the camera and move toward the door. It was mentioned that the use of photography on occasion yielded unrevealing stereotypical images. More often, however it opened so many doors. Attention needed to be paid not to neglect any even if they all couldn't be attended to that session.

A further surprise I found was how long photography has been used therapeutically. According to records photography was first publicly available by way of Daguerotype in 1839. In the 1850's Dr. Hugh Diamond was using photography in treating his mental patients. This is just 11 years after photography's inception.

Quite often today it is used to promote self-awareness. Positive effects are seen almost immediately as patients, even severe schizophrenics seemed to be more concerned with how they presented themselves, after viewing their photographs.

Some of the reactions of the most severe schizophrenics were very interesting. One woman looked thoughtfully at her first image then responded "interesting in a foolish way." Many expressed negative initial reactions but all were engaged in the process in some way carefully examining and reexamining their likenesses. My favorite was a woman who simply responded" I disagree."

So how would I like to utilize photography in my master's thesis?

Well' As 1 think of ways I might use photography two quotes or warnings of Susan Sontag came to mind.

> "The camera can intercede the experience and distance
> you from it. At least at the time."
>
> "Photography has done at least as much to anesthetize our
> emotions and sensibilities as it has to enliven them."

These two quotes, or guideposts, would serve as warnings of when I was off track.

I want this protect to be positive.

I want it to be positive for the kids I photograph.

I want it to be positive for their families.

I want it to be positive for me.

And I want it to be positive for people who view the photographs who know neither the people in them nor myself.

I want lives to be touched in a positive manner. those photographed, mine and those who view them.

I want people to be touched both in the process and by the product, the photograph itself.

One of the most telling descriptions of a photograph I've ever read is by Jonah Martin Edelman written in the foreword to his mother's book The Measure of Our Success, by Marian Wright Edelman.

> The 8 x 10 photograph of my parents' wedding occupies a prominent place in both the living room of my house and the recesses of my mind. A record of the pivotal event in the lives of my father and mother. It .also signifies my strikingly diverse heritage. In the middle of the nuptial scene stand my parents, with my uncles and aunts, now long since gray, and grandparents. some since gone, at their side. To my father's right, the group are Minneapolis Conservative Jews. three generations removed from Russia, one generation removed from poverty. My grandfather, stern as always, beckons me to persevere as he did. Grandpa supported his entire family from age twelve, when he peddled papers on the freezing corners of St. Paul for nickels and dimes. He exudes the satisfaction of having raised both himself and others up, but grimaces as if to tell me that the fight is far from over. To the left of my mother, the wedding participants are Black Baptists from Bennettsville, South Carolina. They stare fiercely into my eyes, urging me to carry on a tradition forged with sweat, toil, and pride in the cotton field in the pulpit.

What deep resonances emanate even from the writing about that photograph. Photographs can be equated to writing I believe. Some are brief quotes, and specific declarative sentences. Some are questions and others exclamations. But the really great photographs go beyond sentences to paragraphs, and chapters, and even short stories and complete novels. Those are the kinds of photographs I want to make. Ones that reverberate long after they're viewed and hold those precious distillations, those essences of moments and times to waft over and through our consciousness for years to come.

How I'll do this still eludes me. I still cling to the idea that I want to do portraits of the kids. Any preferences would be to photograph them in their homes, on their beds and in their rooms—environmental portraits. My next preference would be to do their family's portrait, again in their home. I feel concerned however, that these preferences are born of habits and come partially of my own desire to "take" the photograph and control. My own desire to control the process may not be the best way to proceed.

To rectify these concerns I'm considering alternative modes of working. One idea is to photograph the kid with a plain white or gray backdrop. No environment, just the kid. Another way I could involve the kids would be to have them write reactions to their photos and present them together. or tape their responses and play them at a show with the photographs Another mode of operation would be to have the plain background but have the kids use a remote control to photograph themselves. This could be done either with instruction or simply allowing them to push the button whenever they were ready and with whatever expression they chose to present. Still another possibility would be to give them a range of expressions and photograph and label each one i.e., happy, serious, sad, etc.

Any feedback or input would be appreciated.

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